

STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE TOM BLILEY, CHAIRMAN
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE

MARCH 20, 1997

FULL COMMITTEE MARKUP OF H.R. 1003 (HALL)
ASSISTED SUICIDE FUNDING RESTRICTION ACT OF 1997

IT IS WITH GREAT PLEASURE THAT I OPEN THIS
COMMITTEE MARKUP. THE BILL BEFORE US TODAY -- THE
ASSISTED SUICIDE FUNDING RESTRICTION ACT OF 1997 -- IS AN
IMPORTANT AND FORWARD-LOOKING PIECE OF LEGISLATION.

TOO OFTEN, CONGRESS IS FORCED TO RESPOND TO
PROBLEMS AFTER THEY HAVE ALREADY TAKEN THEIR TOLL ON
THE AMERICAN PEOPLE. TODAY, WE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY
TO ADDRESS A SERIOUS THREAT TO THE LIVES OF MANY
AMERICANS -- INCLUDING SENIOR CITIZENS, PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES, AND THOSE SUFFERING FROM CHRONIC OR
TERMINAL ILLNESS, OR FROM LIFE-THREATENING DEPRESSION.

BEST OF ALL, WE ARE TAKING ACTION BEFORE THIS THREAT HAS TAKEN THE PRECIOUS LIFE OF ANY OF OUR VULNERABLE FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS.

THE THREAT WE ARE ADDRESSING TODAY IS THE POSSIBILITY THAT LEGALIZED ASSISTED SUICIDE -- AND THE USE OF FEDERAL FUNDS THAT COULD RESULT -- MAY LEAD TO THE VOLUNTARY AND INVOLUNTARY SUICIDES OF TENS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE.

THIS BILL CLARIFIES FEDERAL LAW TO MAKE ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN THAT NO FEDERAL DOLLARS ARE USED TO PAY FOR ASSISTED SUICIDE.

THAT IS CURRENT PRACTICE TODAY. AND -- WHATEVER HAPPENS IN THE SUPREME COURT OR IN ANY OTHER COURT IN THE NATION -- THAT IS WHAT MUST BE THE LAW IN THE FUTURE.

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK MY FRIEND, RALPH HALL, FOR HIS COMMITMENT TO THIS EFFORT. AND I WOULD LIKE TO COMMEND CHAIRMAN BILIRAKIS AND THE MEMBERS OF THE HEALTH SUBCOMMITTEE FOR BRINGING THIS BILL BEFORE US TODAY.

I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO SAY THAT, LIKE MANY OF MY COLLEAGUES, I STRONGLY SUPPORT ADVANCING THE KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE OF END-OF-LIFE CARE AND SUICIDE PREVENTION.

WHERE I DIFFER FROM SOME IS MY FIRM BELIEF THAT CONGRESS SHOULD ACT ONLY WHEN IT HAS COMPLETE INFORMATION ON THE ISSUE IT IS ADDRESSING. THE RESEARCH AND DEMONSTRATION GRANT PROGRAM AND THE GAO STUDY ADDED TO THIS BILL BY THE SUBCOMMITTEE WILL GIVE US THIS INFORMATION.

THAT IS WHY I BELIEVE WE SHOULD NOT CHANGE THIS BILL TODAY TO FORCE SOME ACTION IN THE FUTURE. THIS COMMITTEE WILL TAKE ALL NECESSARY ACTION -- WHEN WE HAVE A COMPLETE UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM WE HOPE TO ADDRESS.

I SHARE THE DESIRE OF MY COLLEAGUES TO ACHIEVE THE BEST TRAINING AND PRACTICE OF END-OF-LIFE CARE AND SUICIDE PREVENTION POSSIBLE. LEGISLATION BENEFITTING FROM FULL INFORMATION IS THE BEST WAY TO MAKE THAT GOAL A REALITY.

THANK YOU.